

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Claims 1-52. (Cancelled)

53. (New) A process for the production of a fermented dairy product comprising the steps of:

(i) contacting a food material with a stabiliser to provide a food intermediate;

and

(ii) fermenting the food intermediate;

wherein the stabiliser comprises a depolymerised pectin and wherein the food material comprises a milk protein.

54. (New) A process according to claim 53, further comprising, before step (ii), the step of (i)(a) pasteurising the food intermediate.

55. (New) A process according to claim 53, further comprising, before step (ii), the step of (i)(b) inoculating the food intermediate.

56. (New) A process according to claim 53 comprising, in the following order, the steps of:

(i) contacting a food material with a stabiliser to provide a food intermediate;

(i)(a) pasteurising the food intermediate;

- (i)(b) inoculating the food intermediate; and
- (ii) fermenting the food intermediate.

57. (New) A process according to claim 53 further comprising the step of (iii) pasteurising the product of step (ii).

58. (New) A process according to claim 53 further comprising the step of (iv) adding juice and/or acid to the product of step (i)(b) and/or to the product of step (ii) and/or to the product of step (iii).

59. (New) A process according to claim 53 wherein the depolymerised pectin has a viscosity at 25°C in a 5% solution of 15 cP to 400 cP.

60. (New) A process according to claim 53 wherein the depolymerised pectin has a viscosity at 25°C in a 5% solution of 20 cP to 200 cP.

61. (New) A process according to claim 53 wherein the depolymerised pectin has a viscosity at 25°C in a 5% solution of 25 cP to 50 cP.

62. (New) A process according to claim 53 wherein the depolymerised pectin is an essentially linear carbohydrate polymer.

63. (New) A process according to claim 53 wherein the depolymerised pectin has a galacturonic acid content of at least 65%.

64. (New) A process according to claim 53 wherein the depolymerised pectin has a degree of esterification at least 50%.

65. (New) A process according to claim 53 wherein the depolymerised pectin has a degree of esterification of from 50 to 85%.

66. (New) A process according to claim 53 wherein the depolymerised pectin has a degree of esterification of from 65 to 75%.

67. (New) A process according to claim 53 wherein the depolymerised pectin has a degree of esterification of less than 50%.

68. (New) A process according to claim 53 wherein the depolymerised pectin has a degree of esterification of from 20 to 50%.

69. (New) A process according to claim 53 wherein the food material further comprises a protein of vegetable and/or microbial origin.

70. (New) A process according to claim 53 wherein the food material comprises milk.

71. (New) A process according to claim 70 wherein the milk has a milk solid non-fat content of 0.1 to 25 wt%, preferably 3 to 25 wt%, more preferably 9 to 25 wt%.

72. (New) A process according to claim 70 wherein the milk is whole fat milk or partially defatted milk.

73. (New) A process according to claim 53 wherein the milk protein has been isolated as a protein powder or protein isolate.

74. (New) A process according to claim 54 wherein the pasteurising step (i)(a) takes place at a temperature of at least 80°C, preferably about 95°C.

75. (New) A process according to claim 54 wherein the pasteurising step (i)(a) takes place over a period of 5 to 15 minutes, preferably about 10 minutes.

76. (New) A process according to claim 55 wherein the inoculation step (i)(b) comprises the addition of a live food-grade micro-organism.

77. (New) A process according to claim 76 wherein the live food-grade micro-organism is a probiotic bacterium.

78. (New) A process according to claim 76 wherein the live food grade micro-organism is selected from the list consisting of *Bifidobacteria*, *Streptococcus thermophilus*, *Lactobacilli* and mixtures thereof.

79. (New) A process according to claim 76 wherein the live food grade micro-organism is selected from the list consisting of *Bifidobacteria*, *Streptococcus thermophilus*, *Lactobacillus casei*, *Lactobacillus rhamnosus*, *Lactobacillus bulgaricus* and mixtures thereof.

80. (New) A process according to claim 76 wherein the live food grade micro-organism comprises *Streptococcus thermophilus* and *Lactobacillus bulgaricus*.

81. (New) A process according to claim 53 wherein the fermentation step (ii) takes place at a temperature of from 30 to 50°C, preferably from 37 to 43°C.

82. (New) A process according to claim 53 wherein the fermentation step (ii) takes place over a period of 2 to 48 hours.

83. (New) A process according to claim 56 wherein the pasteurising step (iii) takes place at a temperature of at least 80°C, preferably about 90°C.

84. (New) A process according to claim 56 wherein the pasteurising step (iii) takes place over a period of 5 to 30 seconds, preferably 10 to 20 seconds.

85. (New) A process according to claim 53 wherein the fermented dairy product is a beverage.

86. (New) A process according to claim 53 wherein the fermented dairy product is a fermented milk drink.

87. (New) A process according to claim 53 wherein the fermented dairy product is a yoghurt drink.

88. (New) A process according to claim 53 wherein the fermented dairy product is a drinking yoghurt drink.

89. (New) A process according to claim 53 wherein the fermented dairy product is a stirred yoghurt.

90. (New) A process according to claim 53 wherein the fermented dairy product contains a live food-grade micro-organism in an amount of from 0.01 to 0.03 wt%, preferably about 0.02 wt%.

91. (New) A process according to claim 53 wherein the fermented dairy product contains the stabiliser in an amount of 0.3 to 3.0 wt%.
92. (New) A process according to claim 53 wherein the fermented dairy product has a pH of less than 4.6.
93. (New) A process for the production of a fermented dairy product comprising the step of dissolving a stabiliser directly in a food material wherein the stabiliser comprises a depolymerised pectin and wherein the food material comprises a milk protein.
94. (New) A process according to claim 93 wherein the stabiliser is in a solid form.
95. (New) A process according to claim 93 wherein the food material comprises milk.
96. (New) A process according to claim 53 wherein the depolymerised pectin is amidated.
97. (New) A process according to claim 53 wherein the stabiliser comprises a blend of two or more depolymerised pectins.
98. (New) A process according to claim 53 wherein the stabiliser comprises a blend of a HE depolymerised pectin and a LE depolymerised pectin.

99. (New) A process according to claim 53 wherein the stabiliser comprises a blend of a LE amidated depolymerised pectin and a HE depolymerised pectin.

100. (New) A process according to claim 53 wherein the stabiliser further comprises a high molecular weight pectin.

101. (New) A process according to claim 53 wherein the stabiliser comprises a HE depolymerised pectin and a high molecular weight pectin.

102. (New) A fermented dairy product obtained or obtainable by the process of claim 53.

103. (New) Use of a stabiliser for improving the texture and/or viscosity of a fermented dairy product, wherein the stabiliser comprises a depolymerised pectin.

104. (New) Use according to claim 103 wherein the stabiliser further comprises a high molecular weight, high ester pectin.